

[Rufus H. Dunnahoo]

Redfield, Georgia B.

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RUFUS H. DUNNAHOO

Oldest Living Roswell Pioneer

Established Blacksmith Shop in 1881

Helped Build First Hondo River Bridge

Rufus H. Dunnahoo, Roswell's oldest living pioneer, came from San Antonio, Texas to New Mexico in July 1880, and settled at Seven Rivers - eighteen miles north of the site on which building of the present City of Carlsbad was started nine years later, in 1889.

At the time of the coming of Mr. Dunnahoo, Seven Rivers, then in Lincoln County, and the town of Lincoln and White Oaks were the only towns of any consequence in Southeast New Mexico. Roswell - sixty-five miles north of Seven Rivers - was only a cattle trading Post, having one store and a post-office. Roswell today, in a modern city of 12,500 population, while all that remains of Seven Rivers are remnants of adobe walls and what is known as "Boot Cemetery", where most of the men were buried with boots on, after numerous shooting escapades.

At that time all the land from Seven Rivers, on both sides of the Pecos River, as far north as the Bosque Grande country thirty-five miles northeast of Roswell - a distance of nearly

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one hundred and twenty miles - was used as cattle grazing land by John S. Chisum who brought the first herd of cattle to the Pecos Valley in 1867. [???

The town site of Seven Rivers in Eddy County and Roswell in Chaves County were in Lincoln County until Eddy and Chaves County were created by Act of the Territorial Legislature in 1889, going into effect January 1, 1891.

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When coming to New Mexico, Mr. Dunnahoo ran across a bunch of immigrants at Pecos, Texas, who were traveling in a caravan of sixteen covered wagons. They had become discouraged, because of drouth conditions, and were ready to turn back with their herd of cattle that had become tired out and weak from lack of food. Mr. Dunnahoo contracted to assume all responsibility in driving the herd, if they would continue the journey with him. The immigrants gladly gave their consent and Mr. Dunnahoo brought the cattle safely thro'ugh to Seven Rivers. Soon after their arrival a band of Geronimo's Indians came at night and stole the teams - thirty-two head - all of the caravan horses, excepting the ones belonging Mr. Dunnahoo, who had bought the old [beckwith?] Rancho and placed his horses in a five foot high adobe corral on his rancho.

Besides his ranching interests he established a blacksmith shop in Seven Rivers, but he soon became dissatisfied with the lawless conditions of the "Wild and Wooly" town and decided to seek a more peaceful place to live. Accompanied by some of his men companions of the caravan, he headed for Las Vegas.

Traveling a dim trail via Roswell at that place they found the Hondo River up, and no bridge on which to cross into the town. Captain Joseph C. Lea and Buck Guice, a friend of his, came down on horseback and gave them advice and assistance. He sent them three vigas (large beams) these they laid across the river and covered them with small under brush they cut from the river banks. Over this hazardous crossing the seven wagons, of

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the caravan, crossed safely into the town of Roswell owned by Captain Lea and his wife, Sally (Wildy) Lea.

Remembering the beautiful country around the promising town and the kindness of Captain Lea, and Mr. Guice, he returned a few months later, in 3 1881 to make Roswell his permanent home. On this second trip he found the "make-shift" bridge, he helped build, had been strengthened by Captain Lea, who kept it up, for over three years, for a crossing for travelers many of them being gold seekers, going to Silver City or White Oaks during the gold rush days of the seventies and early eighties.

During the year of Mr. Dunnahoo's coming to Roswell, in 1881, he opened a much needed blacksmith shop on the corner now occupied by the "Green Lantern" on North Main and Fourth Streets.

He was one of Roswell's first musicians. He played the violin and Will Lumbley the banjo for a Christmas party in [1890?], given at the nine room adobe ranche house at South Spring, six miles south of Roswell, which was owned by John Chisum.

Antelope and deer, quail, and rabbits were plentiful in tho'se days. Buffalo still roamed the country on the plains east of Roswell, coming as far west as the Pacos River.

Mr. Dunnahoo was a good buffalo hunter, and it is said, by old timers, that he has undoubtedly killed more antelope and deer than any other man that has lived in New Mexico.

After Mr. Dunnahoo came to Roswell a band of Indians broke out of the Mescalero Indian Reservation and eluding the Government officers (who tho'ught they had the Indians trapped in a big cave three miles east of Fort Stanton) they escaped by coming out [onthe?] opposite side of El Capitan Mountain where they stole a bunch of horses and bringing them thro'ugh this region of the country, camped on wild waste land, which is now the campus of the New Mexico Military Institute.

Mr. Dunnahoo and his wife Ann (Hearnly) Dunnahoo, who were married in 1869, had three children when they came to Roswell to make their home; a boy named George, and two girls, Ruth and Maude. Another daughter born after they came to Roswell was named Sallie for (Wildy) Lea, wife of Captain Lea. Only two other white children lived in Roswell at that time, they were children of Captain and Mrs. Lea, Wildy, a boy, and Elinor, a baby girl, who was the first one born within the town of Roswell.

Mr. Dunnahoo makes his home with his daughter, Mrs. Sallie (Dunnahoo) [?], and her husband Mr. Henry [?], who lives about three miles east of Roswell, where Mr. Dunnahoo can see from his front porch the old home of his friend Pat Garrett. One of his most cherished possessions is a photograph of Mr. Garrett taken about the time he killed the famous New Mexico outlaw, Billy the Kid, in July 1881.

Mr. Dunnahoo is the son of R. P. and Katherine (Atkinson) Dunnahoo. He was born in the State of Mississippi on George Washington's birthday on February 22, 1849.

At the advanced age of eighty-nine years, he is still active, and as strong and enjoys as good health as numerous other men many years younger.

He is highly respected and honored in the community where he lives and stands high in the affections of the early settlers of Roswell, among whom he has lived continuously for nearly sixty years.

Source of Information

Mr. Dunnahoo in person - Roswell

Personal knowledge of writer